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ANTI-NATURE IN NATURE ITSELF

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ABSTRACT: *Nature and civilization are often regarded in opposition to each other. However, civilization employs technologies and is based on laws of nature. Also, the historical world is a result of the development of the natural world. An “anti-nature” must thus be contained somewhere within nature. The idea of “anti-nature” is neither alien to the Eastern nor to the Western traditional concepts of nature. The philosophy of Lao Zi never embraces mere naturalism. Lao Zi has observed that things in the world are not always “so on their own” but rather in the mode of anti-nature. Anti-nature in nature itself does not become expressive until Christian theology, in which the origin of evil is reflected upon. The last part of the paper begins with one Buddhist thought expressed in the Diamond Sutra: “The world is not the world that is named the world.” Through naming of a thing, this thing is objectified or substantialized, and an objectified thing is not the thing itself. This self is “śūnya”, a non-world, which is what the world is. This non-world (as well nature) is first and foremost concealed by ego-consciousness that tends to objectify the things. Ego-consciousness as this anti-nature tends to conceal this non-nature, and begins to act in the form of technology. The radical way of solving the problems caused by this “anti-nature” must begin with gaining an insight into the nature of ourselves as well as the nature of technology.*

Keywords: *Śūnya, nature, anti-nature, technology, civilization*

1.

The concept of nature is a well-known and much discussed subject, with a long history since ancient times, both in the East and in the West. But the concept “anti-nature” is perhaps strange for the reader, and one might be curious to discover what it means. Therefore, some preliminary remarks should be made first. With the announced title, I refer to the problem of the relation between nature and civilization, or nature and technology. Nature and civilization (or technology) are often regarded

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as being in opposition to each other. The slogan “back to nature” is ascribed to Rousseau, although Rousseau himself never used this phrase. The slogan represents the wariness of those human beings who see civilization as the phenomenon of “anti-nature.” Descartes wrote that a building that is planned and built by one architect has a much better order than that which consists of old and new parts built and reconstructed for different purposes, assembled by many architects.¹ What he meant in the end was that a way of thinking with one clear “method” is preferable and should be pursued. Clearly, the contrast between “nature and technology” was thereby established.

But this contrast loses its self-evidence if technology, as well as civilization, is regarded from the perspective of the evolution of the world of nature. Human beings, who stand at the top of the evolution of living beings, are a product of the natural world. The civilization that they have built with technology can never be separated from the natural world. Moreover, technology, which enables civilization, is always based on the law of nature. Nothing of what drives technology contradicts the law of nature. A contrast between “nature and spirit” seems to exist, as long as neither “evil” nor “good” exist in nature, while these ethical values are indispensable in the human life-world. Immanuel Kant said that “nature begins with the good, while history begins with evil” (Kant 1786, 115). He recollects the story of original sin committed by Adam. But it was also the “nature” of Adam to transgress the order of God. Human beings have a tendency to do evil based on their own nature. But especially the historical world is as well a result of the development of the natural world. The sometimes antagonistic relation between nature and civilization or technology is similar to the relation between father and son who revolts against his father. “Nature” contains in itself a tendency to be against nature. An “anti-nature” must be contained somewhere within nature itself. Nature is never a substantial self-identity. It is a “contradictory self-identity”.²

Therefore, the first thesis of my paper is: what is achieved by natural sciences is always based on the law of nature. Technology is driven by way of applying this law. Its theories, experiments, and enterprises are grounded in the law of nature, which contains no irrational or illogical jump. Every product and system of technology is rational, and nothing contains contradictions with the law. As such a modeling of the law of nature, technology is an expression and development of nature itself, and, in this sense, it is the product of nature, which is alive and moves itself.

This first thesis is intended to remind us that not only the organic and biological but also the mechanical and material nature is alive. It would not be necessary to quote some philosophies of life or of the will, such as the one by Schopenhauer, who

¹ R. Descartes, *Discours de la Methode*: Philosophische Bibliothek Bd. 261, Hamburg, 1960. seconde partie. p. 18: “Ainsi voit-on que les bâtiments qu’un seul architecte a entrepris et achevés, ont coutume d’être plus ordonnés, que ceux que plusieurs ont tâché de raccommoer, en faisant de vieilles murailles cités, qui avaient été bâties à d’autres fin.”

² An expression of the Japanese philosopher Kitarô Nishida (1870-1945).

wrote *The world as will and representation (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung)*, or Nietzsche's conception of "the will to power" (*Wille zur Macht*). Nature, including the inorganic and lifeless world, has never been unmoved. It evolved from the beginning of the "Big Bang", and on the top of the history of the cosmic evolution on earth, as a minimal part of the great universe, the human being is now living. He is driving natural science and technology.

My second thesis is a different observation that can lead to an antithesis of the first thesis: technology, being itself a product of nature, produces things that would never be produced by the natural world alone: new sorts of plants and animals by way of bio-technology, new materials by way of artificial and experimental environments, virtual realities through which the reality of the world is led and rebuilt to a new feature, the change of the global climate (which is not the result of a natural disaster, but that of the industrialization and exploitation of natural sources), and so on. The development of technology has a tendency not only to change and to rebuild but also to disrupt and to destroy the natural world. With regard to this tendency, one can say that technology, which is a product of nature, tends to revolt against this nature. This is to be called the tendency of "anti-nature".

Man could be tempted to seek the origin of this "anti-nature" in the physical structure of composing materials. Although this direction is not included in the following reflection, it is not excluded either. Only some suggestions could be given without being further developed. It is known that our universe consists not only of matter but also of "anti-matter", which is also known by its other name "dark matter". It belongs to "black holes", whose inner structures are not known at all, because they cannot yet be "observed". Even if black holes were to be observed somehow someday, the observed facts would only be expressed by way of mathematical figures and not in the way in which we see the phenomena in time and space. The observation in physics is an action that influences the way of being of that which is observed. This condition of observation becomes decisive in case of the world of antimatter because the relation between matter and antimatter is not the same as the relation between right and left, white and black, guilty and not guilty, which are observed in the same space, the same field of color, and the same field of law, respectively. Antimatter cannot be observed in the way in which matter can be observed. But it is still contained in nature in the wide sense of the word. Black holes swallow the space and time around them into their dark areas, but the universe includes this action of swallowing its own parts.

However, by "anti-nature", I do not primarily refer to physical phenomena like anti-matter. What I refer to with "anti-nature" belongs to the level of the "idea" or the "view" of nature, which of course, cannot be independent of the knowledge of physics. But still it is to be differentiated from the physical way of observation. The most important difference lies in the fact that, first of all, in the "view" of nature, nature is not the object to be observed. As I mentioned above, it is also said in modern physics that the action of observation cannot be abstracted when observing nature. Yet, in physics, -nature is to be known is the "object" of observation. Also, the observer is not he, she, I, or you, but a generalized person, or to put it more radically,

“no one”, and at the same time, “everyone”. However, according to the worldview of natural science, only the essential nature (*Wesensnatur*) of this “everyone who observes” is to be grasped together with the essence of that which is observed.

2.

Let me begin my second reflection with the thesis that the idea of “anti-nature” is neither alien to the Eastern nor to the Western traditional concepts of nature. I quote a Daoist reflection on “nature” from the text *Dao-De-Jing*. One of the most well-known phrases of its philosophy of nature states: “Man models himself on the Earth; the Earth models itself on Heaven; Heaven models itself on the Way; and the Way models itself on that which is so on its own” (Lao Zi 1992, 77, 236). The translator uses here for the Chinese word *nature* (*zi-ran*) the descriptive expression: “that which is so on its own”. The philosophy of Lao Zi is known as the thought of nature, of “that which is so on its own”. At first glance, there seems to be no mention of “anti-nature” in the nature *zi-ran*.

But it has to be remarked that “nature”, as the last and ultimate model of the way of being of the universe for Lao Zi, never means mere naturalism which says that everything is spontaneously so on its own. Just the contrary: Lao Zi, or the group of thinkers under this name, has observed that things in the world are not always “so on their own”. On the contrary, he saw that man does not model himself on the Earth, and the Earth is devastated because it does not model itself on Heaven. The “Way” on which Heaven models itself is realized only rarely. Where is that “which is so on its own?” The whole text of *Dao-De-Jing* (道德经) is a trial to explain what nature *zi-ran* is, only because so many things are not so on their own, but rather in the mode of anti-nature.

The second remark is that this nature, the Way, is not to be realized nor restored through establishing the moral and virtue as is argued by the school of Confucius. There are many ironical and logical criticisms against the doctrine of Confucianism in the text *Dao-De-Jing*. To quote only one example:

Therefore, when the Great Way is rejected, it is then that we have the virtues of humanity and righteousness; When knowledge and wisdom appear, it is then that there is great hypocrisy; When the six relations are not in harmony, it is then that we have filial piety and compassion; And when the country is in chaos and confusion, it is then that there are virtuous officials. (Lao Zi 1992, 70)

The virtues of humanity and righteousness, knowledge and wisdom, filial piety and compassion, virtuous officials, and so forth are all subjects of Confucius. The words quoted above is therefore a radical Confucius-criticism by Lao Zi, who does not deny these virtues, but criticizes the artificiality of idealizing and ideologizing these virtues *as* virtues.

The ideal way to go back to the Way of nature is according to Lao Zi “doing nothing”, which is synonymous with the “naturalness” in the sense of the Way. Doing

nothing should not be taken as a form of resignation, as a will-less and powerless abandoning. In truth, it is not easy at all to persist in doing nothing, because man is living, and what is living is always doing something, which is a self-expression of the one who lives with his own ego. On the one hand, doing something is natural as an activity of living, but on the other hand, it is also an activity through which the “innocent naturalness” goes missing. For Lao Zi, the water is often given as an example of this naturalness. Confucius tries to reach this naturalness through learning and mastering the virtues of humanity, righteousness, wisdom, filial piety, compassion, and so forth, but Lao Zi finds the consciousness of these virtues as disguising naturalness. He tries to come back to the naturalness of “doing nothing”, which should be the realization of the Way. This “doing nothing” is of course also some kind of doing something, if one were to insist, as long as it is acquired by exercising the Way. Daoism is a Way of practice and exercise. But this exercise is not for the purpose of acquiring techniques, but consists in renouncing all techniques, of letting everything go on its own. That could also be said in respect to chaos and confusions as the phenomena of anti-nature in nature. These phenomena would not be overcome by virtuous officials, but by being left to go on their own. Behind this thought, there is the absolute trust of Lao Zi in nature itself. Just as muddy water becomes clear again with time, nature itself should bring back the anti-natural phenomena to nature itself.

3.

It is a big question whether we can hold the same belief in great nature, which Lao Zi had. For, the phenomenon of anti-nature today, is not like muddy waters, which without any interference become clear again in time. They can, of course, become even muddier through a technological trial of correction to stop the water from becoming muddy. Precisely these technological rehabilitations of the natural world could accelerate and accomplish the tendency of anti-nature in nature itself. As said earlier, technological products are things that nature alone would never bring about. The richer and closer to perfection the technological world is, the farther away from our life will the natural world be.

In the history of philosophy, the existence of anti-nature in nature itself has been discussed logically. The reflection on the logical structure of the identity $A = A$, for example, is only understandable when it is presumed that there is no ‘passing’ of time. Substance A is in the present time t_1 and is to be defined as A_1-t_1 . When time flows so that the present time t_1 changes over to t_2 , the substance A is now A_2-t_2 , and this means that the identity of A has undergone temporal change. A_1-t_1 is not identical with A_2-t_2 . If the existence of the observer is also taken into consideration, as is done in modern physics, the structure of identity can no longer simply be that of the unchangeable substance. The observer sees that A_1-t_1 moves in time and space and becomes A_2-t_2 . One does not usually see that an observation co-constitutes this process, but one notices that everything that is observed and confirmed in time and space can be valid if substance A_1-t_1 moves with the absolute speed of light. With

some things that move with the absolute speed of light, there is no passing of time. But this is valid only for the one who observes them, and not for these moving things. We can go back to the classical problem of ancient Greek philosophy because it is not yet settled. Perhaps there is no definitive “solution”, but new developments and questionings as repeated in the history of philosophy. One question, for example, concerns the relation between “*to on*” and “*to mê on*” [that which is not], or between “being” and “generation”. For Parmenides, “*to on*” and “*to mê on*” have nothing to do with each other, but for Plato, a phenomenon such as a flower is the mixture of “*to on*” and “*to mê on*”, as long as it is participating in the “idea” of this flower. The ground for the identity of this flower does not lie in this flower, but in its “idea”. The flower is therefore not quite identical with itself.

This problem of identity has been developed and deepened repeatedly. A most important example is the speculation of German idealism, in which the infinite Absolute was conceived in relation to finite things. Genuine infiniteness should not be contrasted to finiteness, because the contrast forces the infinite to become a kind of finite. The genuine infinite should be the “identity of the identity and non-identity”, as Schelling and Hegel conceived it. The identity of a finite thing cannot gain its own identity through itself, and that means that its identity is conditioned by something that is not itself. A flower as a finite thing cannot be a flower only by itself alone. It is a flower through something which it *is* not. To its identity belongs the other.

This other, the non-identity of a thing in itself, is not yet anti-identity. This anti-nature in nature itself does not become expressive until Christian theology, in which the origin of evil is reflected. This universe is created by God, who must be the supreme good. In Christian theology, God is often named “*natura*” or “*natura naturans*”, while created things are “*natura naturata*”. Evil phenomena exist in “*natura naturata*”. The origin of evil should not be ascribed to God, but it cannot exist without the creation of God. Somewhere and somehow in *natura naturans*, anti-nature must be contained, which gives birth to evil. Anti-nature must be contained in nature itself.

Of course, the products of technology are not evil. They bring us many benefits and make human life comfortable, but as mentioned above, the more advanced the development of technology, the farther away the natural world. The natural environment is transformed into a “cultural environment”. Technology can guard nature against the devastation of nature caused by uncontrolled technical development, but it can also devastate nature, causing disaster and destruction. The potential power of technology as anti-nature in nature itself is so huge that when it explodes, for example, in the form of an accident at a nuclear power plant, the disaster cannot be compared to muddy waters that become clear again in time. Lao Zi had never anticipated the tremendous potential of anti-nature in the form of modern technology. His belief in nature can be upheld only as long as its son does not revolt against the father.

For the sake of the philosophy of nature with the belief in nature, it can be said that an expression such as “destruction” or “disaster” already expresses a viewpoint of the human being. In nature itself, there is neither “destruction” nor “disaster”. Even

when a huge comet crushes the Earth so that sunshine is covered with dust clouds, the forests burn up, and almost all living beings perish, that is not a disaster, but natural progress that is neither good nor evil. Nature knows no anti-nature. A black hole, as a world of “anti-matter” that swallows the material world around it, is recognized by a physicist as simply the order of the world and its reversal. Only the beings with reason—with the word of Immanuel Kant: die *vernünftigen Wesen*—see anti-nature in nature itself.

4.

Each philosophical approach to and insight into this anti-nature is located within its own spiritual history. We have caught a glimpse of ancient Greek philosophy, medieval Christian theology, and German idealism, which form the history of the so-called ontotheology, also named metaphysics. In the East, the thought of Lao Zi gives us, together with the thought of Zhuang Zi, the important background of Buddhism, which was transferred from India to China and then transmitted to Japan, the only country where Mahayana Buddhism has been developed further. In the Japanese philosophy represented by Kitarô Nishida (1870-1945) and developed by the Kyôto school, Buddhism, on the one hand, and Western metaphysics, on the other hand, are the two most important sources. Modernity is the third background of this philosophy. I mentioned earlier the logical keywords of Nishida, the “contradictory self-identity”, as one expression for what I mean by “anti-nature in nature itself”.

In the following and last part of my paper, I will discuss one Buddhist thought that corresponds to Nishida’s thought of absolute contradictory self-identity. This Buddhist thought can also be regarded as a philosophical deepening of Lao Zi’s conception of nature.

Let us focus on a single saying from the Kongôe-Hannya-Sutra (Diamond Sutra). In one of the translations, it reads as follows: “The world is a non-world that is named the world.” Another translation could be: “The world is not the world that is named the world.” The negation with the letter “非” can be related to the word *world* as well as to the sentence as a whole. The meaning remains the same. If the word *world* is replaced with *nature*, the saying reads: “Nature is non-nature that is named nature.” With this saying, a modification of our theme is provided, finding “non-nature in nature itself”.

A widespread, common interpretation of the Buddhist saying above would be: The capacity of language to express is always limited; that which is said with language is not that which actually is. According to this common interpretation, the saying merely expresses that the world is not that which is named the world. But of course, the *signifiant* is not the *signifié*. The limit of the power of language to express must mean something different. At least one meaning will be that with the naming of a thing, this thing is objectified or substantialized, and an objectified thing is not the thing itself. According to Buddhist thought, this self is “*sūnya*” (*Leere*). The world is *sūnya*, therefore a non-world, and this is named the world. No name can point out this *sūnya*-nature. The expression “non-world” is a compromise in hardship.

Suppose that a thing is named *apple*: It is necessary for this thing to have the name “apple” so that it can be objectified and known as an apple. An ontological question for the apple as an object is enabled with this name. Also, a philosophical and transcendental question for the nature of this consciousness, namely the structure of the “intentionality”, as it has been discussed by Husserl, is accompanied by naming the “thing” apple. A scientific observation of an apple, combined with its objectifying and substantializing, needs the name “apple”. In all cases, the naming *apple* is the achievement of the ego-consciousness. Within this frame, reflection is enabled.

However, at this point, the Buddhist way of thinking would then be, according to the above-mentioned saying: The apple is non-apple that is the named apple. If it is the named *apple*, it is no more the apple itself, but the apple as an “object”. The self of the apple is not the apple as an object. The apple itself, before being objectified, is “non-apple”, but this must be covered and concealed in the scheme of subject-object, although this scheme is an indispensable condition for treating the apple, be it in the way of a practical, theoretical, aesthetic, or scientific way.³

Nevertheless, precisely in this self-evident way of treating and regarding the apple as “non-apple”, the self in the Buddhist sense is concealed and forgotten. This means, on the one hand, the error of human beings in a religious sense, that is, the way of existence in everyday life in which one does not confront his or her own self, to put it in the words of the German philosopher Heidegger “das Man”. This everyday mode of existence is the oblivion (Vergessenheit) of one’s own original nature or authenticity (Eigentlichkeit) and is marked by being scattered (Zerstreutheit) into various interests. With these remarks, we reach the point in which the relation between the “anti-appleness” and the “non-appleness”, the “anti-nature” and the “non-nature”, could be considered one step further.

From a phenomenal viewpoint, it is easy to see that the “non-nature” as the nameless self of the nature is first and foremost concealed by the ego-consciousness as the fundamental attitude of self-maintenance. This ego-consciousness is indispensable for driving the everyday life. But it is also the starting point of spiritual life, when it reflects on its own ego-centric subjectivity which is finite and mortal. In order to overcome the limitations of life, ego-centric subjectivity tries to better, advance, prolong his life with certain successes, but never with the success in achieving immortality or in postponing permanently one’s own death. It develops his own intellectual ability of judging evil and good, to be ready for the worst and to

³ In physics, the physicist is not questioned, while in Buddhist thought, the self is the key problem. To experience the self of the apple as non-apple is to experience the self of the ego, which is usually understood as being the subject. The self must be egoless. In Buddhist thinking, above all in Zen-Buddhism, this self must be grasped and experienced. A Kōan question of Zen Buddhism asks: “If you name this thing a bamboo-spoon, you give only a name without pointing for the self of this thing. But if you avoid to name this thing a bamboo-spoon, the self escapes from you. Say something, to go through this *aporie*.” The logical answer to this question is: The bamboo-spoon is non-bamboo-spoon, and that is named bamboo-spoon. It must be added that this logical answer is not the answer required in the praxis of a Kōan question, in which the self of those who think logically the bamboo-spoon must be grasped.

understand the meaning of the world. A part of this effort and struggle is to control, overcome, rule and exploit nature. It is this ego-consciousness that functions as the “anti-nature” in nature itself. Remember that the origin of evil in theological thinking lies in Creation, without being ascribed to the Creator.

From where comes the anti-nature in nature itself? This is a central theme in Mahayana Buddhism. See for example the scripture “*Daijō-kishin-ron*”, in which the self as the nameless non-nature is named “the true *sūnya*”. The word “*sūnya*” is written with the character “sky”. The cloudless sky is often covered by clouds, which darken the world. According to “*Daijō-kishin-ron*” the origin of the benighted ignorance which darkens the world remains unknown. But we frequently observe that the cloudless sky itself is that in which the humid air condenses itself automatically to form the clouds which conceal the sky. The blue sky conceals itself by herself. Remember the word of Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, who said “Nature loves to conceal herself.”

The problem is that the cloud in the sense of the darkening ego-consciousness is also the fundamental attitude of self-maintenance of human beings which promotes and moves our life. The ego-centric subjectivity which conceals the cloudless sky of “the true *sūnya*” is also the promoting power of forming our society and producing necessities for our life. The question is how big and thick these clouds of anti-nature are today, and if it is possible to let these clouds simply go away without letting the real world lose vitality or decline. Neither Lao-Zi nor the author of “*Daijō-kishin-ron*” knew such a question in the age of technology. A new thinking is obviously required today where every prolonging of the position of ego-consciousness, be it in the way of ethics or technology, not only promotes but also accelerates the tendency of anti-nature in nature itself.

There is not sufficient time left to discuss the problem of responsibility. Therefore, I will only outline, by way of summary: Ego-consciousness as anti-nature in nature itself tends to conceal non-nature which is the truth of nature itself. It begins to work as the power of self-preservation by way of technology which conceals non-nature in objectifying, forming, changing and often exploiting as well as destroying the natural world. Technology is a modern form of such self-preservation of human beings who tend to produce the necessities for their own existence. The progress of this technology is combined with the tendency of threatening the existence of nature, and also of itself. The radical way of solving the problems caused by technology is not to go back to the natural world prior to civilization but to gain an insight into the fact that anti-nature roots in nature itself. This insight also depends on the insight into our own nature whose tendency of self-preservation is the promoting power of technology. What is required of us is to transform this battle of anti-nature with nature itself into a kind of a “playing game” in a profound sense of the term. The founder of Japanese Buddhism, Shinran, wrote:

The bodhisattva’s saving of sentient beings is like a lion’s taking of a deer; the action is free of the slightest hesitation and is performed as if in play. Second, it means that in saving, one perceives no object of salvation. The bodhisattva, in observing sentient

beings, sees that in the final analysis they are nonexistent. Although he saves countless sentient beings, in reality there is not a single sentient being who realizes nirvana. Manifesting the act of saving sentient beings is thus like playing a game. (Shinran 1997, 174)

This is the ultimate view of Buddhism. The lion hunts a deer according to its nature, and the deer is killed according to its nature. Only human beings regard the relation of both as violent. But in reality, both are free of violence. A deer that should be “saved” is nowhere to be found, nor is a lion that should be tamed. All is performed in “play”, whereby the performers are quite earnest, but without having the consciousness of purpose or obligation.

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